

## **Facts concerning the freedmen**

FACTS CONCERNING THE FREEDMEN.

THEIR CAPACITY AND THEIR DESTINY.

COLLECTED AND PUBLISHED BY THE EMANCIPATION LEAGUE.

BOSTON: PRESS OF COMMERCIAL PRINTING HOUSE, 36 KILBY STREET,

1863.

### **"LET THERE BE LIGHT." IMPORTANT FACTS CONCERNING THE NEGRO.**

The following letters have been received in reply to a circular sent to those who have charge of negroes within our military lines in the South. We give the letter which was sent, and the statements returned, in their own language. Read and ponder.

I.

#### **Circular of the Committee.**

At a recent meeting of the Emancipation League, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to take measures to procure from the superintendents of "contrabands," and others, information bearing upon the question of the capacities of the colored men of the South. It is proposed to use this information in the best way to bear upon the problem as to what is to be the *status* of the negro after the Rebellion is suppressed. Among the agencies to be employed in securing a fair solution of this problem, we hope to be able to induce the authorities at Washington to establish a Department or Bureau of Emancipation. For this purpose, as well for any other purpose connected with the solution of this great problem of the birth of a people, we want facts.

Will you have the kindness to answer, as fully as is possible, as many of the following questions as you can?

1. What is the number of freedmen ("contrabands") in your department?

Men above 15?

Women above 15?

Children under 15?

2. Are they willing to work?

Do they save their earnings? What are their habits as to profanity? intemperance? chastity?

3. Do they desire to go North? In the event of general emancipation, and fair treatment at home, would there, in your judgement, be any disposition to go North?

Would this disposition be increased or diminished by emancipation?

4. What are the facts as to their capacity and desire to learn?

How many could read when they first came within our lines?

How many can read now?

How does their capacity to learn compare with that of others in similar ignorance, and with the same means of education?

5. To what extent is the religious element developed?

What have you found to be their disposition as to docility, subordination, and kindred virtues?

6. Have you found any disposition to revenge upon their masters,—to “cut their masters' throats”?

6. How many have been employed by the Government?

At what wages?

What wages has the Government paid white laborers for the same services?

Have the wages of the freedmen been regularly paid?

If not, how much is now due to them in your department?

How much would be due to them if their wages had been the same as those of white laborers for similar work?

Taking in the whole history of your department, have or have not the freedmen who have come into our lines earned enough, at fair wages, to support *all* who have come?

8. What has been their treatment by military officials or subordinates?

How far has this treatment operated to encourage or discourage industry, economy, and thrift?

If they could receive fair play, would or would not those able and willing to work, earn enough to support the whole?

In your judgment, are the freemen in your department fit to take their place in society, as a laboring class, with a fair prospect of self-support and progress? or do they need any preparatory training and guardianship? If so, of what nature and to what extent?

And would they need any different training and guardianship from what other men, equally ignorant, would need, to take their place in the community?

In the event of the reconstruction of Southern society on the basis of free labor, how would they compare, in capacity for progress, with the "poor whites", of the South, who have come within your observation?

Please add any other facts or suggestions pertinent to the consideration of the question,—what shall be done with the emancipated slaves?

Your obedient servants,

**Committee.**

F. W. Bird,

J. H. Stephenson,

S. G. Howe,

M. D. Conway,

Benjamin H. West,

II.

**From Beaufort, S. C.**

Beaufort, Jan. 6, 1863.

*Dear Sir:*

General Saxton has handed me a circular letter lately received by him from the "Emancipation League." As he is too much occupied to be able to answer the letter himself, he has directed me to answer it for him.

General Saxton estimates the number of contrabands in "the Department of the South," at about 18,000. In the State of South Carolina alone there are now within our lines not less than twelve thousand contrabands. The number at Key West, Saint Augustine, Fernandina and other points in Florida is about six thousand, according to the best estimates we can now make.

Statistics carefully gathered about the first of May, 1862, show that out of a population of 9050, on the plantations of South Carolina then within our lines, 3619 were children too young to be classed as field hands. I am not able to answer your first question more fully.

In answer to your second question, I will say, that after having lived on the plantations for nearly eight months, with good opportunities for observing the conduct of the negroes as free laborers, it is my personal conviction that the negroes in this Department, almost without exception, would readily become industrious and productive laborers under any liberal system which should offer a fair and reasonably certain compensation, proportioned to the work actually done. Considering that a reasonable certainty of enjoying a fair harvest, is the only natural inducement, other than that of absolute necessity, for any man to work, I think that the negroes in this Department have so far shown as much willingness to work, as white men would have under the same circumstances.

Although the negroes here are very ready to spend their money for clothing and the ordinary comforts of life, and although many of the women are fond of hoop-skirts and jewelry, I do not think that a disinterested witness would say that the negroes form a marked exception in these matters to the rest of humanity.

As regards profanity and intemperance, I think the negroes, except where they have learned bad habits from our soldiers, are a marked exception to the human family generally. I believe however, that if ably managed dram-shops should be established at suitable points on these islands the

negroes would soon acquire the habit of intemperance, and thus all distinctions of race in this respect would be swept away.

As to chastity, it is my own opinion, formed entirely since I came to Port Royal, that although slavery made them in a great measure regardless of the *ceremony* of marriage, it did not wholly take away their birth-right of modesty, or the idea of fidelity between man and wife.

In answer to your third question I would say, that except in rare instances, there is no disposition to go North. As long as life can be made even tolerable to them in the South, they prefer to stay in their old homes.

The desire to learn is almost universal. Their desire is so great that they learn very quickly,—the teachers all say as quickly as white children. Few could read when they came within our lines: now many can read. I cannot answer this question more fully.

The religious element in their nature shows itself in faith, rather than in practice. They are more pious than moral. Their condition as slaves was undoubtedly favorable to such a development of the religious element, and the style of religious teaching which was prevalent in the South did not stand in the way. Freedom and the “pernicious doctrines” of liberal christianity, will, I believe, develop the moral element. Their want of morality appears chiefly in the common habit of lying and stealing.

I came to this Department without any knowledge of the negro character, prepared to meet a race of savages not only thirsting for “the horrors of a servile insurrection,” but quite ready to tear me limb from limb unless I could succeed in making myself agreeable to them. I have since found them as a very general rule gentle and ready to obey reasonable orders—almost too gentle in many cases to stand up for their own rights. I have very seldom seen any disposition to revenge upon their masters.

I believe that nearly all the able-bodied persons, both male and female, have been employed to a greater or less extent, by the Government or its officers during the past eight months. The agricultural operations carried on at first by Mr. Pierce, and then under Gen. Saxton, gave employment to between four and five thousand laborers. Of the other able bodied persons within our lines there are probably very few who have not been employed to some extent either in the Quartermaster's or Commissary's department or as private servants to officers and civilians. Although there is good demand for labor, it is not a very steady demand. The laborers often lose much time in the intervals between one job and another.

The quartermaster's department pays to common laborers five dollars per month, besides giving each laborer a soldier's ration; to mechanics eight dollars per month, besides the ration. The *very best* mechanics get as high as twelve or fifteen dollars per month.

The Government has undoubtedly got a great amount of work done by the negroes at a very moderate cost, and yet I do not think that the negroes have much desire or reason to complain, except in cases where they have suffered loss of wages or great delay in payment through the negligence or dishonesty of other employees of the Government.

Those employed in agricultural labors on the plantations have not been paid by the month. Labor on the plantations was not started with a view to profit for the Government, but for the purpose of making a large population industrious and self-supporting. When the products of this year is sold, and the account is closed with the laborers, they will have received all they have fairly earned.

The Government has probably paid the wages of the freedmen as regularly as that of its other employees at this time. Delay in payment is often caused by the negligence of subordinate officers.

Where the Government has been obliged to support destitute "contrabands" it has issued only such portions of the army ration as were absolutely necessary to support life. No fair-minded man acquainted with the facts of the case, would say that the "contrabands" in this Department have so far been "a great burden" to such a Government as ours.

From very many officers of all grades, as well as from very many privates, the negroes have received kind treatment. From many other officers and privates they have received abuse and injustice. Such treatment has had its natural effect.

In my judgment, equal laws *faithfully administered* would enable the negroes to take their place in society, as a laboring class, with a fair prospect of self-support and progress, until society at the South is re-constructed and a healthy demand for agricultural labor becomes possible, perhaps some such system of training and guardianship as is now in practice here, is necessary, or at any rate desirable.

Your obedient servant.

E. W. HOOPER,

Capt. & Aide-de-camp to Gen. Saxton.

P.S.—General Saxton on handing me your Circular said that perhaps the best and truest answer to most of your questions would be to say that he has found these people “intensely human.”

III.

**From Fortress Munroe.**

Fortress Monroe, Dec. 30, 1862.

1. Our department covers several counties, and therefore it is impossible to give a very correct estimate of the number of the colored population. It is several thousand.

We have on this Point about six hundred working men, and less than half the number of women and children. In Camp Hamilton and Hampton proper, 502 men, 574 women, and 664 children.

2. Yes. I never have seen a class of men more willing, if any inducement is offered.

This is the universal testimony of nearly all employers.

Very few have any earnings to save. Many who have no families and can get pay only in part, are saving money or depositing it for safety and future use. Very few drink, or are profane. It is almost universally reported by the enemies of this people, and repeated by thousands who believe it, that they are very unchaste. This does not seem an unreasonable conclusion, considering the teachings and practice and development of slavery. Nevertheless we come to a very different conclusion. Unchaste women are not counted very good breeders, and in all this region we find very few bastards, or women who are not wives and mothers. No doubt there are exceptions.

3. Very few are willing to go North, except for safety. I have had applications from large numbers wishing servants and offering good wages, lying over for months because of the unwillingness of any to go unless some special reason.

4. As to capacity. No particular difference but in desire for knowledge and improvement is much stronger among the colored people. Scarcely one could be found who could read as they came in. Now very few but can read some, and all are getting books and with or without teachers are striving to learn themselves and one and another. Their progress is more rapid than I have ever known among other classes.

5. Their religious element is marked and strong, though crude, partaking largely of the relics of heathenism and slavery. One thing is clear. While their old habits and customs cling to them in their

modes of worship, their faith and confidence in Divine revelation??s prominent and almost universal. Schools o? meetings are kept up nearly every evening in the week, and have been for months.

Never knew a people more docile and confiding and easily managed and kept at work. Have had no serious case needing punishment for months.

6. Not an instance.

7. Not less than 2000. Nominally \$10 a month. A very large proportion have been paid nothing or next to nothing. White laborers get \$25 per month and found. Over \$30,000 are due the colored people for labor, to say nothing of a great amount of labor nights and Sundays for which nothing is allowed though promised, and also for extra valuable services. If paid same as white laborers the amount would be more than double. If all could have their just dues that have worked for the government at fair rates, they would now have a fund of \$50,000 and upwards; double if the same pay as the whites.

8. There have been some exceptions, but 1\* 6 the rule has been brutal and cruel in the extreme. What they need is what they have long been promised but never had protection from the abuses of rebel sympathisers, and reasonable encouragement and opportunity to get a living. As compared with the poor whites, one is a source of wealth and the other of degradation.

C. B. Wilder.

IV.

### **From Craney Island.**

Craney Island, Dec. 31st., 1862.

Before answering your inquiries, I will state, that Craney Island, is situated at the mouth of the Elizabeth River, about five miles from Norfolk, and ten from Fortress Monroe. It contains about fifteen acres of land; it was selected as a contraband depot because of its security from visitation of the secesh, and for the purpose of removing the contrabands away from the soldiers. A large portion of the people upon the Island are the wives and children of men that are working for the government, or employed as servants for the officers in the army.

1. The whole number upon the Island is 1381.

Men above 15 200.



Women “ ” 750.

Children under 15 431.

2. They are willing to work; more so than the working class of whites would be, with the same inducements for labor. Of the two hundred men, fifty are engaged in catching oysters for the use of the Island; one hundred are at work getting wood and assisting in the construction of barracks. I have no reason to expect the government will pay them for this labor, hence they are not having any “earnings” to save; but I find many of them have from fifty to one hundred dollars they have saved during the past year while they had the opportunity of working for themselves. They are not profane or licentious. I have not seen an intoxicated colored person since I have been in Virginia, (nearly eighteen months.)

3. They do not desire to go North—I have several times tried to find house servants willing to go, with the prospect of a permanent home and good wages, but always have difficulty in finding those willing to go. The only thing that will make them willing is the fear of being again enslaved. One objection they have to going is the climate of the North; another, (which I think has more weight with them) is the fear of not finding again the friends they would leave behind. In case of “emancipation and fair treatment at home,” there would be no disposition to go North.

4. They have an intense desire to learn, far beyond anything I have ever seen manifested by whites, and their ability to learn to read is fully equal to that of the whites; beyond this I have no means of judging—I think however, they would be *slow* mathematicians—memory seems better developed than any other of their mental faculties; of those upon the Island, but four could read when they came within our lines; we now have twenty *good readers*.

If the circumstances under which they have lived are fully considered, I think they will compare favorably (intellectually) with the whites.

5. Twenty per cent of the adults are professors of religion—their religion however, appears to be more a matter of *feeling* than of *principle*; like many white christians they have more of it in their meetings than out of them.

They are somewhat given to lying and stealing, but I think no more so than could be expected of any race enslaved.

6. I have never found them vindictive or revengeful. If you talk with their old owners they will tell you, “the reason why you find the niggers so *good*, is because all of the worst ones have been sold South.”

They say, "if we get hold of a vicious one and can do nothing with him, we sell him South at once, and buy a better one in his place."

7. The most of those upon the Island as I have stated, are women and children. Many of the women have been employed in the hospitals at Newport News and Hampton. I think all of the washing and police duty about these hospitals was done by contrabands. I know from personal observation that such was the case at Newport News. They were *slaves* to the hospital, doing all of the dirty work, &c. Those at Newport News never received any pay from the government—they worked faithfully there from three to five months—they were not paid on the ground that "such help in hospitals was without authority." I have placed their pay rolls in the hands of Dr. Russell, of Mass., but have not heard from him since.

It is my belief that the freedmen that have come into the Union lines within this department, have performed labor enough to support all that have come in; much of the labor however, has been performed in other military departments—many of the able-bodied men were sent to Harrison's Landing last summer; since that time large numbers have been sent to Washington—many of them are employed by officers in the army, as servants. Then wages have not been regularly paid.

8. I believe Gen. Dix, commanding this department, is disposed to do all in his power for the benefit of the freedman, but the necessities of the freedman have never been provided for by Congress, hence the power does not exist with the military head of the department to arrange for the freedmen so as to encourage "industry, economy and thrift."

There is unquestionably "will" and muscle enough among them to "earn enough to support the whole," but the trouble is, under the existing system, to arrange so that each individual shall have the opportunity to labor, and receive a just compensation for his labors—this I deem essential to "fair play."

I do not think they are "fit to take their places in society with a fair prospect of self-support and progress"—even in the North they would by public sentiment be kept as a servile and inferior race, while in the South this sentiment is of course much stronger.

I think their only chance is colonization under suitable guardianship. It is absurd to suppose that the training that has been considered necessary to make them *good slaves* has been such as to fit them for free men—we can only judge of the capacity of the colored race when a generation shall arise that has had the opportunity of being fitted by education to care for themselves and to perform the duties of freemen.

I believe at this crisis our duty is plain. Let us place the freed man upon soil where he will receive the benefit of what he produces—guard him from abusing his freedom, or from its being abused by others—educate his children properly; and if he cannot take the care of and govern himself in twenty years, we will then admit that it takes a longer time to get rid of the curse of slavery than we supposed, and the system is a great deal worse than we ever thought it to be.

O. Brown.

V.

**From Helena, Arkansas.**

Helena, Jan. 2. 1863.

1. About 4000.

Men above 15 1800.

Women “ ” 1200.

Children under 15 1000.

2. They are for fair wages. Generally they do. A number of them are quite profane, and talk like men who had heard more swearing than praying. There is scarcely any intemperance among them. Their chastity will compare favorably with that of the whites, and it is at least thirty per cent better than that among the whites of Memphis, Tenn.

3. Conditionally they do. In the event of emancipation there would be no disposition to go North. Emancipation fully carried out and secured, they would nearly all much prefer to live in the South.

4. Similar to those of other races. Few could read when they came within our lines—they are now using the spelling book—are learning to write, and several lead as exhorters and preachers. I believe with proper attention the rising generation will learn as readily as the children of any other color.

5. They have faith in God, and in the promises of His word—but they are a “great ways back.”

Their docility, subordination and kindred virtues are remarkable—without a parallel in the history of the race.

6. None whatever. They make no threats. They seem to wish well to their masters, but fear that it will not be well with them in the next world, however they fare here.

7. In all about 1000. The highest number at any time on the Fort, 350, at 40 cents per day, and three dollars for clothing, per month. White laborers receive one dollar per month more. The freedmen have never received a dollar. Not far from \$20,000 is now due them, and if their wages had been the same as the whites, nearly \$2000 more would be due. I believe they have earned enough, had their wages been promptly paid, to have supported all who came.

8. Their treatment has by no means been complimentary to the officials and subordinates, which has operated to discourage and dishearten in most instances. They could save enough to support the whole. They are not altogether fit to take their places in society; they need preparatory training and guardianship; that of supervision and instruction, until they are taught more of self-reliance. I am not satisfied that they would need any different training from what other men equally ignorant would need, and I am strongly persuaded that they would not.

I have been thrown so much with the "poor whites" of the South during nine years ministerial labor in E. Tennessee, and since the progress of the war, have seen and learned so much of them, that I am clearly of the opinion that the contrabands would and could not make worse progress.

Secure them against oppression, and leave them where they are—or gradually colonize them.

Yours very truly.

Samuel Sawyer, Chaplain 47th Reg., Ind. Vol.

VI.

**From St. Louis, Mo.**

St. Louis, Dec. 27th, 1862

*Dear Sir:*

I have your note of the 11th instant, enclosing circular.

Without answering your questions in regular order, I will state briefly my views on the subject, regretting that want of time will not allow me to give it that attention which its importance demands.

My duties as Army Quarter-Master to the gun-boat Flotilla, commenced with the appointment of Admiral Foote to the chief command, and ended on the 30th September last, the Flotilla having at that date, by act of Congress, been transferred to the control of the Navy Department. I am now engaged in the settlement of my accounts.

While I was Quarter-Master of the Flotilla, "contrabands" were employed in various capacities, as firemen, deck hands, laborers, &c. Of the total number employed, I can not say, as the pay rolls were handed to me certified by the proper officers, and I had no time to examine as to the individuality of the persons employed. I had some fifteen or twenty under my immediate charge, employed on the coal barges, to keep them free of water, and load with coal the transports and gun-boats. This was very arduous service, as they were called upon at all hours of the day and night. This duty they performed at an expense of one dollar per day to the Government. For white laborers doing the same duty, we had paid one dollar and twenty-five cents per day, and had great difficulty to obtain them at that price. In some cases the Provost Marshall had to be called upon to pick up straggling laborers, and force them to do necessary work.

The public service would last summer at Cairo have been put to serious inconvenience if we could not have obtained the labor of the "contrabands." They were more obedient, did more work, were of temperate habits, and were less disposed to absent themselves than the white laborers.

On the gun-boats and transports, contrabands were in demand, and I saw many who appeared to be highly valued by the officers of the boats. Their work was very severe, and such as they had been entirely unaccustomed to.

They were not provided for as they ought to have been, particularly in the way of clothing. Notwithstanding all this, I never heard of one who voluntarily returned to slavery. Few complained of ill-treatment by their masters, or expressed feelings of revenge towards them. They appeared to regret leaving their relations and homes, and would have gladly returned if assured of freedom.

Before the war, I was an officer in charge of a party on the U. S. Survey of the Coast, and for seventeen years was engaged principally in the Slave States. I often had mixed crews, of negroes and white men, and consider the negroes of the Southern States as having superior intelligence to the lower order of white people in the same country. This may arise from their associations with the better class of whites, and the much greater comfort in which they lived.

I have found the Southern States by no means unhealthy, and if the same attention were paid among the people to order and cleanliness as at the North, the bills of mortality would be much less. The wealthy people of the South do not live in as much comfort as those of moderate means at the

North. There is no part of the South that the labor of the white man cannot profitably be employed, and no greater fallacy was ever started than that cotton and rice can only be cultivated by the negro. I never enjoyed better health than when working among the swamps and lagoons of Florida, and sometimes as late as June.

I believe that a Northern constitution can much better stand the malaria of the South, than the negro can the cold of the North.

I have long been of the opinion that slavery is a great curse and drawback to the prosperity of the Southern States. I believe if slavery were abolished, both black and white would be incalculably benefitted thereby. Where slaves receive a portion of their wages, and I have employed many such, I have always found them more valuable to me and their masters.

The negro is quite susceptible to kind treatment, and slight rewards; and good words will have more effect upon him than the overseer's lash.

As a class, I do not by any means think the negroes equal to the white man, but education and freedom will greatly improve them. If I were a resident of a Slave State, (as I am,) I would advocate immediate emancipation. For the sake of the whites, even more than the blacks, do I advocate it. I have never seen one good feature in slavery, but a fruitful source of all evils.

Very respectfully, your ob't serv't,

Geo. D. Wise.

VII.

**From the Army of the District of East Arkansas.**

Helena, Jan. 1, 1863.

*Gentlemen:*

In replying to the questions propounded in your circular, I am happy in associating with me the Rev. J. G. Ferman, the Post Chaplain of this Cantonment, and who came here early with the first troops that arrived, and is better acquainted with the negro population among us than any man I know of, with the exception, perhaps, of Rev. Sam'l Sawyer, who has taken special interest in them, and special pains to acquire all possible information respecting them. I rely, therefore, mainly on the

statistics of Mr. Ferman, and in our opinions and conclusions, we, at least for the most part, concur. So that this may be received as our conjoint reply.

The figures attached to your questions will be *our* guide and *yours*.

1. About 3000.

9

Men above 15, about 1,500

Women, 800

Children under 15, about 700

2. For fair wages they are generally, though there are found not a few exceedingly lazy and *shiftless* men and women among them, and the children are running at large doing nothing. Hundreds of the men have worked for the government for several months *without any pay*.

Generally they are *saving*. They are far less profane than an equal body of soldiers in camp,—30 per cent. less. Very little *intemperance* exists among them. It may be owing to the fact that the means of intemperance are put beyond their reach.

And as to *chastity*, their women will compare more than favorably with an equal amount of females in similar rank and circumstances among the whites, either here or elsewhere. This may possibly be owing partly to the fact that many of them do not present sufficient charms to allure the white men. The marriage relation, however, sets lightly upon both males and females.

3. Except to obtain freedom, they seem to have none. Could that boon be secured to them in the South, they would choose to remain there to going North, and this disposition would be greatly diminished, if not annihilated, by *emancipation*,

4. The children can be as readily taught as white children—in *music* much more readily. And while many of the adults evince great *desire* to learn, they have equal capacity with white men in similar circumstances.

Few could read when they came into our lines, and few have since learned, as no means of instruction have been furnished them except a few spelling books, which they themselves have purchased or begged.

5. The religious element exists to a much larger extent, evidently, than among whites. They are exceedingly susceptible to religious emotions. They have a number of their preachers here, and many meetings, greatly thronged and long continued. But their religion is beclouded with great darkness.

They are the most docile, forbearing, affectionate, and subordinate to authority of all the races of men. Their attachments are very strong, and they are remarkably imitative and teachable.

6. No such disposition has been discovered by us in a single instance. We have heard of some few instances of a revengeful spirit; but generally they evince attachment to their masters, even under severe provocations; and would gratefully receive freedom as a boon at their hands.

About 1000 have been employed by the government, and by order of Gen. Curtis they were to receive \$10 per month, rations, and clothing; but Gen. Steele ordered that their *wages* should be "*retained*," that it might be decided in courts of law whether it should be *paid* to *them*, or their *masters*.

Soldiers get \$13 per month, rations, and \$3.50 in clothing. The freed men have not been paid off at all that we are aware of. About \$50,000 are now due them; and not less than \$80,000, were they to get the same as white laborers for similar work.

Their wages would more than have supported them; and such as have obtained money from other sources have frequently been *robbed* of it.

8. Generally bad—very *bad*. Maj. Gen. Curtis, Gen. Washburn, Gen. A. P. Hovey, and some others, have dealt justly and humanely with them, but many officers and their subordinates have been hard, unjust, and cruel to them. And by the ordinary privates of the army they are treated as savages and brutes. This treatment operates most discouragingly upon them; and yet most of them labor on industriously at any thing they are set to do. Could they receive fair play, they would be both *able* and *willing* to earn *more* than enough to support the *whole*.

For the most part they need teaching and training as new and irresponsible hands. The planters need their labor in the South. Among them they would need little training, and if free it would command good wages. In a peaceful state of society, with a demand for their labor, they can support themselves; and would soon acquire such competence as to make provision of their own accord for schools and churches. They would, at the same time, be greatly benefitted by the aid and training which the white race would give them educationally and religiously.



Being human and rational, they need only such training and influences as all other poor and ignorant people do.

In our marches through and residence for some months in the States of Missouri, Arkansas, and Tennessee, we have met with many poor white people, more ignorant, if possible, and less competent to take part in social and public affairs, than are an equal portion of blacks.

As to what shall be done with "*emancipated slaves*," we think that the wise heads and benevolent hearts of the nation, directed and controlled by the providence of God, as they uprise, will be entirely competent to decide.

Charles Fitch, Chap. 24 Ind. Vols.,

J. G. Forman, Chap. 3 Mo. Vol. Inf.

VIII.

### **From the Washington Contraband Depot.**

Washington, D. C., Dec. 16.

*Dear Sir:*

1. There are 500 now in this camp. Since 10 June 16th, six months since, 3381 have passed through our camp.

Men above 15, 125

All but 15 of which number are in hospitals, or too old or disabled for effective labor.

Women above 15, 126

These are mothers of children, the husbands of whom are in the service of the government, here in Washington or with our armies.

Children under 15, 249

More girls than boys. Out of 3381 who have gone out all but the five hundred now here, there has been a greater proportion of men than women. The men have often left wives and children behind.

2. In a large majority of cases I would *unhesitatingly* say yes. The exceptions are those who have been long in our camp leading a life of idleness.

Do they save their earnings? In some cases they do, but generally not so, but expend it for good things to eat, such as confectionary, or ornaments which are palmed off upon them at fraudulent prices. What are their habits as to *profanity*? Not given very much to profanity. Intemperance? More now than at first. *Rare* it was, when I commenced, six months since, to find a drunken black man. It is not uncommon now.

3. I answer *unhesitatingly, no*. Out of those who have gone out from this camp, I have not been able to persuade, out of the two thousand and some hundreds, more than fifteen or twenty to go North, notwithstanding the most liberal offers have been made them to go. They desire to remain on the soil where they were born, if they can do so and enjoy their freedom. Would this disposition be increased or diminished by emancipation? It could not be *greatly* diminished, but it would not be increased, so facts foreshadow.

4. Those who have come to this camp are from Virginia and North Carolina, and have not exhibited the same capacity with those in South Carolina, at Port Royal. Not *one* in a *hundred* could read before they came inside the Union lines, and but few can read yet. Our school has been taught by two or three gentlemen in the employ of the American Tract Society in New York, but from frequent interruption, from the constant change of new comers and departures, has not shown gratifying results. So that it would be unfair to draw any data from facts so meagre. The people do not show that interest here to go to school that they did when I was in South Carolina.

5. As to this I would say in reply, that this people are the *most religious* people I have ever known, yet it is a religion entirely destitute of morality. If we look into the mind itself we shall see how this is to be accounted for. Reason and judgment do not appear, as yet, to be developed, while the imagination is *over* developed. I never attend their meetings without becoming excited myself; yet their excitement does not come from the presentation of truth, but from *sound* rather than sense, or the peculiarity of the form of illustration. As to docility, I never knew a more *docile* people. Nor is there any disposition to *insubordination*. I have no difficulty in their management in this respect. But to reason with them is out of the question. You must tell them what to do; this they understand; but do not understand what it is to be asked, "Will you have the kindness to do this or that?"

6. I answer, *no!* they pray for the success of the Union army, and that their masters may lay down their arms, but there is no mention made of a spirit of revenge. Out of the 3000 who have come to this camp, at least 1500 have been employed by the government. At what wages? Teamsters at \$25

per month, *without rations*. Five dollars per month of this amount has been reserved, by a recent order of the War Department, for the support of the disabled, and wives and children. Those who labor in the Commissary Department service, \$20 per month with their rations. Those who work on the wharfs in the Quarter-Master's Department, have \$15 per month and rations. Those who cut wood for the government, have 75 cts. per cord, and find themselves. Common laborers have 40 cts. per day and rations. This embraces all those who labor in the service of the government, except those who go with the army as officers' servants, who receive about \$8 or \$10 per month, with rations and their clothes. Those who receive \$25 and \$20 per month, and some of those who receive \$15 and \$12, fill the places of white laborers who received \$1.25 per day. I have been informed that our black men do as much as the white men at this pay, if not *more*. Have these men been *regularly* paid their wages? In the Quarter-Master's, Commissary Department and on the forts, they have been paid each month or once in two months. Those who have worked for officers, or in the camps, or at the hospitals, have not been paid for some reason or other. The wages of about fifty such persons have not been paid for the last five months. These were to have received from \$8 to \$15 per month. The question now occurs, Have not there been earnings enough by all to support all who have come inside our lines? I answer, yes, and more too.

8. There has not been much cause for complaint in this region in this respect, as far as I have been able to find out. The masses could easily work enough to maintain the whole. I answer there is no doubt but this 11 can be done. Do they need a preparatory training and guardianship? I answer it is my mature conviction that such a preparatory training is required before this people are prepared to take their places in society. My plan would be to place these people by companies, say from three to five hundred in a company on a farm under proper instructors, to teach them the arts of life, and just so fast as any show sufficient signs of improvement, they be pushed out into the world to fill their places in society, their places being filled by raw recruits. This would be preferable to scattering them among the whites generally, for the following reasons:

1. It is the nature of this people to live many of them together. This has been their manner of life on the plantations.
2. If distributed among the people generally, while there might be a philanthropic spirit here and there, yet the masses would hire these people for the purpose of making money out of them, and would not, on that account, care so much for their elevation as for the number of dollars they made.
3. The plan proposed would be the best, for the aim and end would be the elevation of the race.

You ask whether this class would require any other training than that called for in the case of the poor white classes. I answer, yes. In my judgment the case of these blacks is different from the poor whites. These people have been slaves all their days—slavery has made them dependant. When they are in a dilemma they turn to the white man. All questions which they cannot solve are looked upon as of easy solution to the white man. The spirit of *self-reliance* is hard to infuse into the soul. Many and varied will the lessons be to inculcate this truth. Long and patiently will the teacher have to wait ere he beholds the fruits of his toil. So long as the roots of the old system remain, we may expect to see the sprouting up of the spirit of dependance. We must eradicate the old system, if we would behold the spirit of *self-reliance* possess the soul.

D. B. Nichols.

Sup't of Contrabands.

IX.

### **From St Helena Island.**

Pope's Plantation, St, Helena Island, S. C.

Jan. 12th., 1863.

*Dear Sir,*

I have received a Circular of the Emancipation League, asking for information in regard to the freed men of the South. I shall be happy to answer the inquiries proposed, so far as my experience enables me to do so. I have been in the Government service here since March last; at first, as Superintendent of a District often plantations on the South side of St. Helena Island, and afterwards, or from July 1st, as General Superintendent of what is called the Second Division of Gen. Saxton's Department, comprising St. Helena, Ladies Morgan, Cousan, Dathan and Wassa Islands.

1. The number of freedmen on the 82 plantations of the Second Division is 4015, exclusive of about 1800 refugees from Edisto and other places, the greater part of whom are now residing at the village of St. Helena, at the northern end of St. Helena Island.

Number of children under 15 about 2200. No record has been made of the aggregate number of women as distinct from the aggregate number of men.

2. The negroes, as a general rule, are willing to work for those persons in whom they have confidence, and who will pay them reasonable wages. The proportion of idlers or loafers among them is hardly greater than it is among an equal number of white men of the inferior classes at the North. They show a great deal of forethought in providing subsistence for themselves, and there is not the slightest danger that they will suffer from starvation so long as they can get land to cultivate or can have an opportunity to earn regular wages.

They are saving of their earnings and generally make a good use of them.

There is very little profanity among them; and as to intemperance I have not seen a single instance of it.

Their habits in respect to chastity are such as one might expect to find where scarcely any restraint upon licentiousness has been heretofore imposed.

3. They have no desire to go North. They are strongly attached to the places in which been they have accustomed to live. Nothing but oppression will make them quit their present homes. In the event of general emancipation and fair treatment, they will be perfectly content to remain where they are. There is little chance, however, that they would be willing to labor at wages for their old masters, because they know too well that their old masters would not be likely to treat them fairly. Rather than work for their old masters, they would prefer to earn a precarious livelihood by hunting, fishing, and raising swine and poultry; or, if they had an opportunity to hire or buy land they would prefer to cultivate the soil on their own account. There need be no fear, however, that humane emigrants from the North would have any difficulty in hiring these negroes at wages.

4. They are very anxious to learn. They consider it a great privilege to go to school. There were not probably ten colored persons in the Second Division who knew the letters of the alphabet last March. There are now at least 500 children and adults in this division, who have made considerable progress in learning to read.

Their capacity to learn is greater than they have had credit for, and is equal to that manifested by the Irish population at the North.

5. The religious element is very strong in these negroes, but it has not been sufficiently enlightened to free them from many degrading superstitions. They believe fully in a future life, and they place implicit trust in Providence. It is much to be regretted that their simple faith has been trammelled by

creeds which tend rather to bewilder their minds than to amend their lives. They need nothing so much as to be set right, by friendly exhortation, upon the plain principles of duty.

They are naturally very docile and kind, and remarkably submissive to whatever they think to be reasonable and just.

6. I never heard the negroes here express a desire to be revenged upon their masters. But they make no secret of their wish never to see their masters again.

7. Nearly all the negroes have been employed by the Government either as laborers on the plantations or in jobs connected with the military department. The wages for plantation work may be put down at twenty-five cents a day. Good mechanics have been paid at the rate of fifty cents a day. The laborers on the plantations have not been promptly paid. Wages, for example, earned in July were not paid until November, and no payment has yet been made for work done in September last. This want of promptness in payment has tended, more than anything else, to discourage the negroes and diminish their confidence in the agents of the Government. I suppose that at least \$5,000 are yet due to negroes in my Division.

White laborers would have earned more, because they would have done more in the same time. The pay of twenty-five cents a day is really pay for about five hours' work.

The negroes on the plantations in the 2d. Division have earned enough to support themselves, but the refugees from Edisto, and other places, have had to rely mainly upon the Government for food and clothing.

8. The negroes in this Division have generally been well treated by military officials and their subordinates; but there have been some exceptions. In a few instances negroes have complained of losing their poultry, eggs or swine, by depredations of the pickets. Such depredations, and the license with which the soldiers have made use of plantation fences, and, in some cases, of plantation buildings for fire-wood, have not a little discouraged industry, economy and thrift among the negroes.

Give them fair play, and the able-bodied negroes will earn enough to support themselves and their dependent relatives.

In my judgment, the freedmen in this Division can at once take their places in society as a laboring class, with a prospect of self-support and progress, provided the persons for whom they labor recognize their rights as members of the human family, and take an interest in their welfare.

In the event of a reconstruction of Southern society on the basis of free labor I should place more dependence upon the blacks than upon the "poor whites" for efficient service; and I believe it would prove a harder task to reclaim the latter than the former from their present degradation.

To convert the emancipated slaves into industrious free laborers will require the most prudent management. But the most important conditions of success in this difficult work are, undoubtedly, to pay them fair wages promptly and at short intervals, and treat them with perfect justice, neither encouraging idleness or other bad habits by indulgence, nor exacting more labor than they can think it reasonable to perform.

Very respectfully yours,

RICHARD SOULE, JR. General Sup't of 2d Division.